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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the 1973 Pilot Literacy Project (Victoria, Australia) was to explore the nature of the problem of nonmigrant adults who had attended school but who considered themselves illiterate or functionally illiterate, to discover what sort of people were illiterate and to what extent, and to examine home influences and educational background. Of the 166 illiterate and semi-illiterate people involved, nearly half were self-generating starters, about one-third responded to a television presentation, and one-third were already known to agencies. The majority had primary school education and over half had one to three years of post-primary schooling. Approximately three-fourths of the group were below 35 years of age. The project geared toward a noninstitutional approach. Tutors, refereed to as group leaders, worked as a task force operating in homes, factories, libraries, and community and church centers. The project was subsidized for 12 groups not exceeding five members. The social benefits derived from group involvement were improved self-concepts, increased employment opportunities, and group unity. Monthly workshops for tutors provided continuous evaluation, information, and support group functions. The concluding section sets forth recommendations by the Victoria Council of Adult Education to combat adult illiteracy. (EA)

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The Way Out

A pilot project in Adult Literacy

Report 1 – 1974

CE 004 519

Published by
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"It must be a strange state to be like Jo. To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes and in utter darkness as to the meaning of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows. To see people read, and to see people write, and to see postmen deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language — to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb. It must be very puzzling to see the good company going to churches on Sundays, with their books in their hands, and to think (for perhaps Jo does think at odd times) what does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how comes it that it means nothing to me? To be hustled and jostled, and moved on: and really feel it would appear to be perfectly true that I have no business, here, or there, or anywhere; and yet to be perplexed by the consideration that I am here somehow, too, and everybody overlooked me until I became the creature that I am."

Dickens: *Bleak House* (Chapter XVI, Volume 2)

"Most people who fail to learn how to read in our society are victims of a fiercely competitive system of training that requires failure."

Herbert Kohl: *Reading How To*

" . . . education is cultural action for freedom and therefore an act of knowing and not memorization."

Paulo Freire: *Cultural Action for Freedom*

COVER: "Paula Friend"

2/4

This is a report presented by members of the Adult Literacy team of the Special Services Section of the Council of Adult Education to the Director of Adult Education who has arranged its publication, with certain additions, for the benefit of those interested in adult literacy.

ISBN 0 7241 7

Foreword

The Project which this report describes was something of a new departure for the Council of Adult Education. Over many years, the Council had made some honest attempts to establish programs in the industrialized Western and Northern suburbs of Melbourne. But, its approaches and its programs had been of the traditional kind normally associated with "adult education". They had made little or no impact on that large community of people with less than average educational background.

Those with little learning were difficult to communicate with; they were not easily to be encouraged into the liberal, non-credit, non-vocation program, nor into the classroom or institutionalized situation.

Literacy, in fact, is a field into which traditional adult education had rarely strayed. It had always been considered the province of "further education", of the Technical Schools, Evening Colleges, and the Education Department's provision through their various "night school" programs.

In Victoria, however, no-one at all had taken it up in any serious way. Whilst it was vaguely recognized that there were in the community many (how many?) adults who were seriously, sometimes tragically, disadvantaged by inability to read, write and numerate at a socially or vocationally acceptable level, no-one had set about tackling the problem.

The schools through which these unfortunate and often desperate people had passed had accepted little responsibility, in any practical sense, for the individual failures which were end-products. Somebody had to take the lead in a salvage program.

In very recent years, the problem of literacy amongst schoolchildren began to receive real attention. It was being discovered that, physical and mental handicaps and migrants aside, a significant proportion of children was entering secondary schools ill-equipped with the basic skills of study — reading, writing and numeracy — and something needed to be done about it. However, little if any parallel attention was

being paid to adults in similar plight. They had to fend for themselves. But, by definition, they lacked the educational equipment equal to the task.

What was disturbing was that the problem lay not merely with the midde aged; over 40% of the random sample of the project turned out to be under 25 years of age and presumably had taken their schooling in the last decade, the decade of the "new education".

The Council of Adult Education stumbled, as it were, on the problem. It had set out, in the first instance, to discover at first hand by direct contact what the educational needs of the disadvantaged suburbs were, those needs which were not being met by traditional programs. The direct contact with social workers, community groups and educational authorities in the Western suburbs uncovered the problem of illiteracy overnight. Within a matter of weeks, the Council had undertaken an action/research project in adult literacy. Its resources would allow it to do little more than care for a handful of people even in the face of the avalanche of demand.

Both in its philosophy and methodology, the Council's project differed widely from the usual approaches to the problem based on the classroom situation. This Report describes both the socio-philosophical basis of the project and the methodologies adopted.

It was clear from the start that an effective literacy program was not going to be concerned merely with the raising of the level of skills, but also with the raising of the level of social consciousness and the multiplication of the alternatives available to individuals by which they could regulate their own lives.

The problem lay deeper than the 3Rs. It was not a matter of a mere lack of skills, an inability to read, write, spell and numerate; we were faced with deep-seated emotional and psychological problems, both those which were the root cause of the individual condition and those which were the effect of it. These relate not only directly to the psychological need for basic literacy and numeracy skills in the development of human personality, but to the whole range of human relationships, in the family, in the work place, in the general social context.

It was not a matter merely of finding teachers. Leaders of special quality had to be found who could fulfil a purpose greater than a normal teaching role. As the Report later says:

" . . . people who are marginally defective, psychologically disturbed, dependent on drugs, unemployed, etc. and who, into the bargain, may have made previous attempts to learn to read and failed, look on the leader as an expert and perhaps a last chance . . . "

Adult Education, in this project, was to become actively and possibly overtly concerned with change in the social condition. In this, more than in any other respect, was it to be a new departure.

Not only did this project bring the Council into first-hand contact with the educationally deprived, but Council was to enter directly into the groundswell of non-institutionalized education. One of the most important and exciting off-shoots of the new work was the development of the chain of small learning cells throughout the suburbs, often on a one-to-one basis, which is herein called The Network. It had become immediately apparent that the problem of literacy was not to be effectively met by highly institutionalized means, through the normal Council procedures, through Schools, Colleges, Libraries, etc. — though all these had a part to play. It was to be met by personal, ground level, informal activity in homes, factories and other informal meeting places.

Again, the Project firmly established Council's role in research. To its traditional entrepreneurial role of bringing together the learner, his tutor and his material was to be added a relatively new role as a research and resource facility.

I commend this Report to those interested in the subject of illiteracy amongst adults. In doing so, I must refer to the work of Ms. Dominica Nelson, Adult Education Officer with the Council. This Report, like the dedicated work which preceded it and will continue beyond it, is hers and that of her band of equally dedicated assistants. Such a Project requires a genuine understanding of and an empathy with the lives of people in special need.

COLIN F. CAVE
Director of Adult Education,
Victoria.

Definition

"A person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and whose attainment in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community's development."

UNESCO, 1962

The terms *'illiterate'*, *'semi literate'* and *'functionaliy illiterate'* have no absolute meanings as levels of reading, writing and spelling. That which would suffice in one walk of life would be wholly inadequate in another.

For the purposes of this project, we agreed that to describe a person as *'illiterate'*, *'semi-illiterate''* or *'functionally illiterate'* would mean:

'illiterate' — having a reading ability less than that of an average seven year old.

'semi-literate' — having a reading ability betwen the ages of seven and nine years.

'functionally illiterate' — unable to read and write at the level of simple every day instructions, fill in forms or consult a timetable; in fact, with insufficient literacy skills for survival.

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Introduction

The following report has been compiled from contributions from all those working in the Council of Adult Education's Literacy Project. It is simply a narrative account of what actually happened during our attempts to assist illiterate and semi-literate adults. It does not purport to be a scientific or statistical analysis of the problem — though some statistics relating to the sample used in the project are included. Its object is to share our experiences as widely as possible.

The Duncan Report (1944) states:
*"Illiteracy is not only a cruel and unjust handicap, from the point of view of the individual, but a disgrace and indeed a menace, from the point of view of society. The illiterate feels himself something less than a full man, something of a social deformity because he cannot read or write. He resists revealing his deficiency and sometimes becomes ingenious in subterfuge to hide it".**

It must come as something of a shock to realise that in our society, where education is a basic right, significant numbers of people still emerge from the school system without a proper grasp of the skills of reading and writing. Thirty years after the Duncan report, educational authorities are only just beginning to recognise that the problem of adult illiteracy exists, and it stems from inadequencies within the school system.

The Council's Project started in October 1973 with one group. In 1974 12 groups were established. These groups form the nucleus of a network of learning cells now operating throughout the metropolitan area. This network includes fourteen Diploma of Education students from the Melbourne College of Education who volunteered to work with needy adults on a one-to-one basis. These volunteers have been visiting people in their homes once or twice a week with very positive results.

This study is based on 166 adults who were interviewed during 1974. Of these 140 actually joined groups.

*Duncan Report, *Adult Education in Australia* p. 106

As in other aspects of adult education, experience shows that teacher training and teaching experience in schools are not of themselves necessary ingredients for the effective teaching of adults. In fact, it can be the case that teacher training and experience in teaching children is a liability rather than an asset in adult education.

The selection of tutors was determined, then, not primarily by professional qualifications but by a high level of therapeutic personality characteristics. This was done following the finding of Truax and Carkhufft who have demonstrated in a number of publications the scientific validity of the earlier empirical observations of Carl Rogers that the person with a high level of, what he called, the three therapeutic central ingredients — accurate empathy, non-possessive warmth, and genuineness — were very much more effective as counsellers, therapists and educators than a person with a low level of these traits.

Contracted and volunteer tutors met each month for a mandatory evaluation workshop to discuss progress, to develop methodology and to attempt some in-depth assessment of the problem and possible solutions.

For those concerned about illiteracy in our society much can be gained from a critical reading of Paulo Freire and Herbert Kohl. Freire has demonstrated the inevitable link between literacy and 'concientization' which in South America means political awakening. With an understanding of the nature of deprivation, literacy ceases to be a problem and people gain an emotional relationship with the written language which means something to them for the first time.

For Kohl, failure to learn to read is a result of a competitive system and inappropriate middle class material fed indiscriminately to everyone beginning to read, children and adults alike.

A literacy program may not be particularly ideological but it must be an honest attempt to disperse the perpetual fog in which illiterate people live.

To do this the small learning groups must be anchored in and sensitive to the realities of their members' lives. In practical terms it means every attempt must be made to incorporate the learning of skills into a socially relevant framework — unemployment forms, situations vacant, danger signs, not *John and Betty* — at the farm, by the sea or on their carefully trimmed suburban front lawn.

Our members' handicaps immeasurably reduce their quality of life as well as their social awareness. Many illiterate and semi-illiterate people submit to bizarre restrictions in their mode of life because they cannot read simple directions, con-

†See Appendix 4, page 40.

sult a timetable or T.V. programme, help a child with homework, cope in a supermarket, or apply for a job which requires more than sheer physical effort.

The aim of the literacy program is not simply to provide skills to cope with the written word in everyday life but to enable people to gain greater freedom to make choices, *" . . . to have a better grasp of real life, to enhance personal dignity and to have access to other sources of knowledge."**

Until recently traditional adult education had little relevance to the lives of people in the lower socio-economic groups. It had failed to recognise the needs of educationally disadvantaged people; it had failed to challenge the status quo which propagates the myth of educational opportunity for all. Literacy and basic education programs which provide alternative learning situations for adults could be an effective means of educational reform and thereby contribute to social change.

This project has demonstrated a very real adult education need in our society, based all to often on inadequacies in the education system.

Educationalists are realising more and more the necessity for remedial programs to cover every stage of schooling, and as a consequence there must be a realisation among those concerned with the education of adults that priority structures must be reset to admit an equal claim to the pressing need, however inconvenient it may be. The findings challenge educational authorities, universities, and teacher training organisations to research the reasons why techniques and training methods which operate in primary, secondary and technical schools continue to fail for so many people in so many areas.

DOMINICA NELSON
Co-ordinator

*FAURE REPORT, *Learning to be* UNESCO, 1972, p. 39.

SECTION I

Aims and Rationale

The Pilot Literacy Project came into existence in October 1973, as a result of enquiries received by the Council of Adult Education about provision for basic education. Many of these came from needy individuals themselves, or from husbands, wives, parents, friends making enquiries on their behalf. Direct approaches were made from social workers, parole officers, school principals, doctors and agencies such as Commonwealth Employment Service, Rehabilitation Centres, Council for the Single Mother and Her Child, and learning exchanges. At the time, the Council was inadequately equipped to deal with the problem in resources and expertise. An action-research program was set up in an attempt to investigate the need.

The prime aim of the Pilot Project was to explore the nature of the problem amongst non-migrant adults who had passed through state and denominational schools, and who considered themselves to be what is termed illiterate or functionally illiterate. A corollary of this aim was to discover what sort of people were illiterate and to what extent, and to examine the influence of home and educational background in relation to these people.

Fundamental to the Project was the idea of removing it from an institutional structure, and of bringing people with reading difficulties who came for help into a warm, therapeutic situation. It aimed at assessing the viability of the sensitive, caring and literate person communicating basic learning skills, in addition to the trained teacher, in the hope of raising community awareness and encouraging self-help schemes. To express this idea practically:—

1. Tutors were called *"group leaders"* because the approach was not to recreate a *'chalk and talk'* classroom situation;
2. The group leaders formed a task force which operated in homes, factories, libraries, community and church centres, and at the Council of Adult Education Centre in Flinders Street.

3. Monthly workshops were held to provide a support group for leaders and to enable discussion of different methods of approach, difficulties, successes and failures. Experts in various fields acted as resource persons.

The Council of Adult Education subsidized this experimental project to the number of 12 groups with no more than 4 - 5 members in each. It was considered that the group situation would be socially important to people who often felt isolated in the community because of their inability to read or write. Where there was a need, it was to be filled on a one-to-one basis as the nucleus of a group. The forming of groups was influenced by the needs of those seeking help, such as time, place, availability. Groups would need to be flexible to cater for shift workers, housewives etc.

From the beginning it was agreed that workshop experiences and findings would be shared with and open to individuals and community groups concerned about illiteracy. There are no blueprints for this particular kind of educational task, and the project aimed at developing as a resource centre for these growing groups within the community rather than becoming itself yet another institution in a situation where it seemed large institutions were unable to reach many of the people with the greatest need.

Finally, group leaders were to compile a report to be published and distributed amongst involved and interested organizations in an attempt to provide some preliminary data on a problem of which there is growing awareness, but on which relatively little research had been done.

SECTION II

The People who Came

Just how wide the need is, no-one knows. However, it is certainly great. Not wishing to raise expectations which could not be met, the Council of Adult Education has done little to advertise its program; yet 166 people have been interviewed and requests for assistance are coming in a steady stream from metropolitan and country areas alike.*

It is probable that the illiterate and semi-illiterate population in Victoria numbers in the thousands. Careful research will need to be carried out to uncover the actual extent of the problem. It is, by its very nature, often a carefully hidden problem. The illiterate and semi-illiterate adult does not readily reveal himself; his whole adult life may well have been one of deliberate subterfuge (as his earlier school life must also have been). Only a special confidence in the "second (last?) chance" program may bring him forth for help.

Part 1
Case Studies

The following comments about ten of the group members are accurate, but the names are fictitious. The backgrounds and difficulties of these people are typical of those who came for help:

JIM is aged 18 years and left at 4th Form Technical School. His aim is to be a sheet-metal worker but he feels that he cannot pursue an apprenticeship, because he is unable to fill in the necessary forms admitting him to the course. Jim says he is very good with his hands at trade subjects, but he can write and read only simple words. He is highly motivated and has attended weekly meetings with his group. His leader states that his confidence has increased remarkably and he is now able to complete forms.

CHERYL is 17 and left school at 15. She attended two primary and two secondary schools. One of the former was denominational and both of the latter State High Schools. While in one

*Vide Appendix 3.

High School, Cheryl had special reading sessions for one year. Her ambition is to be a dressmaker's cutter, and she has commenced an apprenticeship, but cannot progress because of her inability to read instructions on patterns. Cheryl is a shy person and asked to be helped on a one-to-one basis. Six months later Cheryl's leader reports:

"I can't stress enough the importance of a one-to-one relationship rather than a group experience. This is especially so for Cheryl as initially she seemed very shy and with little confidence. It was this one-to-one relationship which built up Cheryl's confidence to the state where she refuses help on the most difficult word, feeling she will manage it by herself. It is at this stage only that I feel Cheryl should move into a group".

TERRY is 29, started school in Grade 3, and finished in Grade 6. His schooling was disrupted for his parents frequently travelled between states. He can read and write a little but has great difficulty with spelling and expressing himself. Terry finds this extremely embarrassing when his children ask him for help with homework, or when his work requires a minimum amount of reading and writing.

ROSE is 27, married with four children. She left school after Form II at a State High School and states she "quite liked school and was good in all subjects except English." Rose left because her parents could not afford to keep her on. She was motivated to join a daytime housewives' group so that she could help her 2 eldest children, who are in primary school, and her illiterate husband. Her determination to continue can be seen in a statement she made recently: *"I had to fill in a form yesterday. Couldn't do it so I said I'd left my glasses at home. I don't want to spend the rest of my life like that!"*

PAULA* is a single mother in her twenties. Her father died when she was five and from the way she speaks it seems she has never got over his death. She attended five schools leaving at Form I. She was in a remedial class at a country State primary school for one year, but was sent to High School because of age and height. At 15 she left school and attended what she thought were remedial classes for 16 months. These classes were in fact a speed reading course for a group of twenty. She then had a private teacher for three years costing $2.50 per session which her boyfriend paid. She joined a dressmaking firm to become a cutter but left because of her pregnancy. Paula desires to become qualified as a dressmaker's cutter and to be completely self-supporting. Paula's group leader says she is highly articulate and intelligent young woman and has made remarkable progress.

*See section on Techniques p. 21.

ROSLYN, a housewife, is 30 and attended a denominational school until 8th grade. She says that she qualified as a hairdresser because at the time of training written work was not required. She passed on her verbal and practical knowledge. Roslyn is happily married with 3 children and her husband has been very supportive and encouraging. She came into a group after seeing a T.V. segment showing the work the Council was doing. Her main motives are to help her children with homework, participate more effectively in parent activities associated with the school, and write letters to friends.

KEITH, aged 39, runs his own trucking business, which involves a great deal of clerical work. This has been done by his wife for the last 8 years. In business Keith has been highly successful and owns his home and two cars. He was able to pass his driving test because it was verbal and the answers to the questions had been pre-taped for him to memorize. Keith is keen to join a community service club but is reluctant to do so because of his limited ability to read or write. He is now in an evening group with men of his own age and feels that he is making progress.

BRIAN is aged 24. Since the age of 14 when he left Technical School, he has worked as a drover, "downer-boy" - labourer, fork-lift driver. He obtained a driver's licence by memorizing answers repeated to him by his girlfriend. Brian was injured at work and was unable to continue physical labour. He finds it imperative to learn to read and write to a standard which will enable him to take sedentary employment.

TED is nearly 60 and as a child lived in a remote country area and had very little formal schooling. He says he can write, but this is in fact only copying. He cannot read and desperately wants help. Ted joined a group and was progressing but, after a couple of months, felt forced to leave as it was too exhausting after a day's work.

VERA, married, aged 24, spent most of her childhood in institutions. She could not read and was told by four different teachers that she was "word blind". She left at 16. Her aim is to "look after old people or do baby-sitting". Vera says she gained qualifications for this kind of work in England. At first Vera reacted badly in a group situation where she sought notice through "clowning". After a few sessions, though, it became apparent to the group leader that she was most anxious to learn.

It is necessary to realize that these case studies represent a sample of a much larger need, and, while fairly representative, they show characteristics of those people who actually came into the project.

Part 2

Statistics

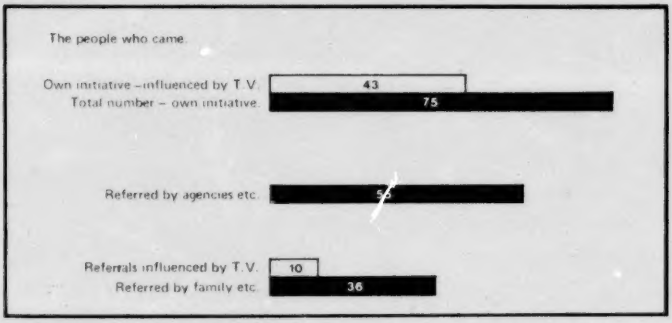
The 166 subjects of these statistics are not necessarily a true random sample. There is no way of knowing how far, or even whether, they reflect the norm in adult illiteracy.

They are a self-selected group, no controls having been built into their selection. Nearly half of them are self-generated starters and thus represent the more initiating or articulate or highly-motivated of illiterate adults, hence their relative youth. About a third of them responded to the accidental viewing of a TV segment on the ABC. A third of them were already known to social welfare, educational and other agencies.

They are not necessarily typical. The conclusions to be drawn relate then only to the group itself, and some care needs to be exercised in drawing conclusions of a more general nature.

These statistics reveal no unexpected patterns but they give solid evidence to what has been felt to be the case by most workers in the field. It can now be shown that the situation is serious, that claims are founded and ignorance of the facts no excuse for those charged with responsibility in areas of social equality and welfare.

Referral

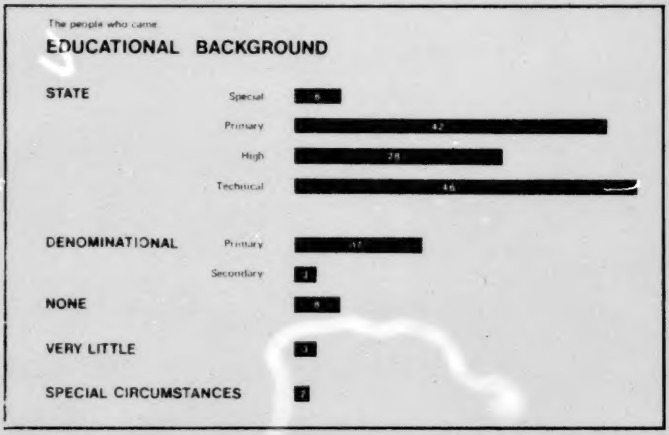


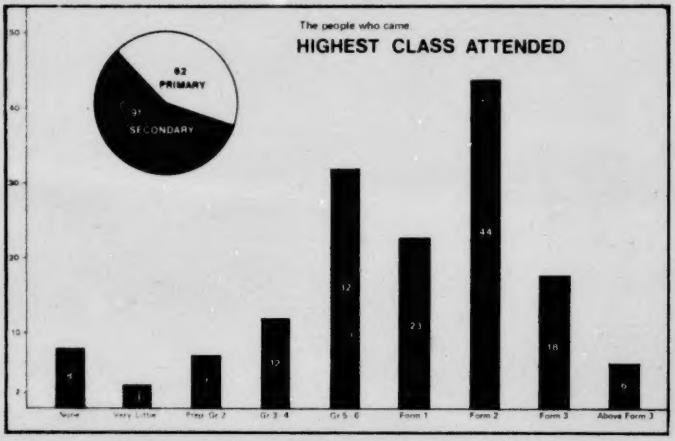
Embarrassment and shame are often very acute and it is not surprising that more than half of those who came within the scope of the project were either referred from agencies, social workers or family and friends.* The rest made the approach on their own initiative and more than half of these saw or heard of the project through the media. However, extensive use of the media was avoided because group leaders wished to avoid raising expectations which could not be met. Such controlled

*Of 'Family and friends' referrals—half were influenced by T.V. response.

publicity would be a key to any expansion of this project and, for that matter those of any other similar agencies.

Educational Background





It is difficult to interpret these two sets of figures without coming to some disturbing conclusions about the effectiveness of formal schooling, of teaching, and of teacher training.

a. All but a handful had primary school education; over 50% spent one, two, or three years of post-primary schooling

and about 60% of these emanated from Technical Schools. It is probable that those coming from High Schools wasted more of their school life than those from Technical Schools, the latter at least have an emphasis on non-literacy skills. But it means that neither primary nor post-primary education could cope with the very basic needs of the student.

b. It would seem certain that a considerable number of students were pushed on from primary to secondary schooling because of age, physique and the requirements of the school leaving age with apparently little or no recognition of the fact that they were entirely unequipped to handle a post-primary education. One can only speculate on the frustrations, the terrors, the disillusionment, the deceits of those wasted formative years, and wonder whether the school by its system or the teachers by their training or both were responsible for the wastage.

c. Although there are no figures, it is general opinion of group leaders that remedial help was virtually non-existent. Any remedial help appears to have been minimal, ill-housed, subject to fits and starts, and characterized by lack of insight and force.

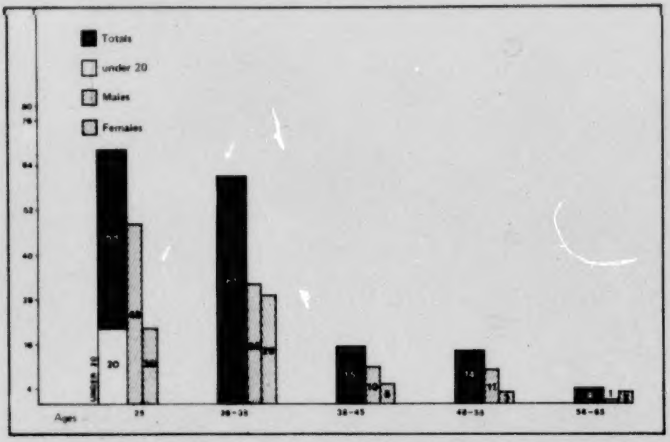
d. Without more research, just what is reflected except the holding power of schools to the school leaving age is difficult to say. However, if most of the students left school at 14 or 15 years of age, then the comparively large fall out at Grade 6 level could indicate that the primary school was holding back weak students for special attention.

Employment

MEN	
Employed — Skilled	16
— Unskilled	66
Unemployed Rehabilitation	7
— Unemployment benefits	11
WOMEN	
Employed — Skilled	2
— Unskilled	19
Unemployed — Home Duties	29
— Unemployment benefits	4
Skilled and home duties	2
Made contact but no more	10
Total	166

Predictably most of the jobs held are unskilled. Job improvement figures very heavily in reasons given for joining groups. Most of these unskilled workers are presently employed but it will be significant to note the number who become unemployed if the economy takes a real downturn.

Age Grouping



Approximately three quarters of the entire group are below 35. A further breakdown of the under 20 group is as follows:—

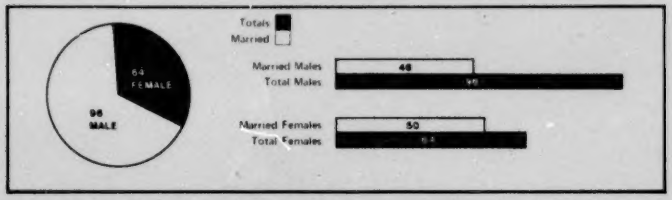
15 years	3	18 years	6
16 years	4	19 years	1
17 years	6	Total	20

a. This would seem to indicate two things: that young people realize very early the seriousness of leaving school without basic skills, that the low level of employment opportunities for those without basic skills makes their need quickly apparent to them. It is not then a problem that they are unwilling to learn but that they are unable to do so.

b. The high level of under 25 year olds (about 40%) also indicates that a disquieting number of young people are still, in an age of modern educational techniques (despite them or because of them?) passing through entire primary schooling and into post-primary schooling without learning the basic skills. Moreover, most of these have been educated in a school system with a school leaving age of 15 years.

c. Those who had little or no schooling are in the older group 60-65, but the comparative size of this group indicates that total compensation for the lack of literacy skills is not possible and that these older people still see a worthwhile return for the effort even at this stage of their lives.

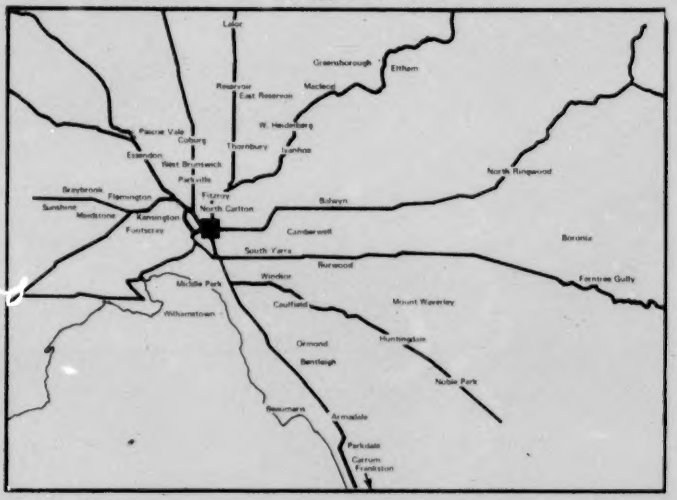
Sex



It is significant that half the men are not married. The lack of basic skills means job status and security are low and unemployment a constant threat. Personal confidence and autonomy are still highly dependent on breadwinning ability for the Australian male. Without breadwinning power, marriage becomes less probable. This may be evidence for a direct link between literacy levels and social disadvantage. It may be, however, that the figures only reflect the widely established fact that illiteracy is always greater among males than females.

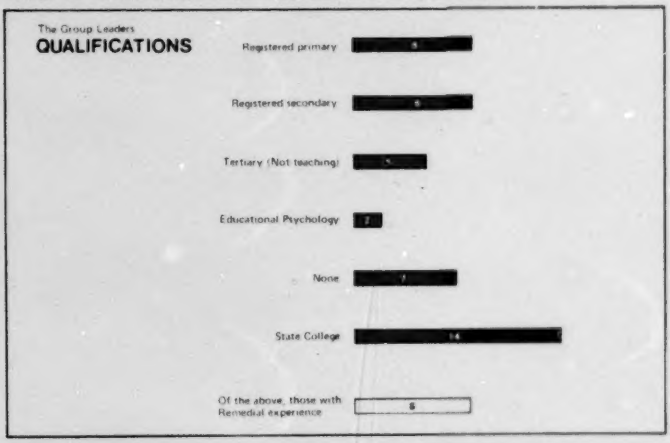
The Learning Network

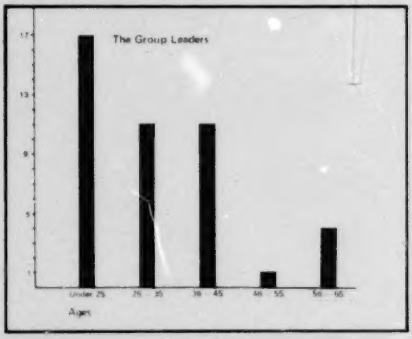
The Network operates largely in people's homes, on a one-to-one or one-to-two basis, and engages mainly those people who wish to be volunteers in the field. It epitomizes the de-schooling concept; it is flexible, informal, warm and operates where people are. The map of the Network speaks for itself in revealing that the adult illiterate may be found anywhere in a large metropolis, that the condition is not the sole prerogative of the so-called "disadvantaged suburbs".

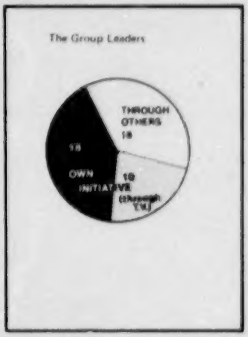


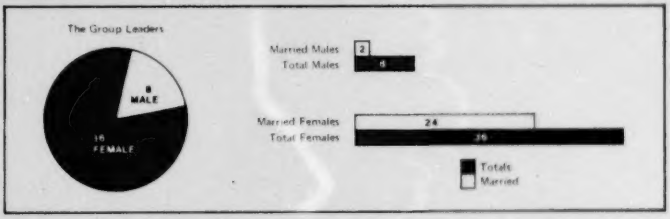
The People who Helped

The figures below attempt to give a simple profile of the leaders in the project. No comment is necessary, other than to say that, of the group of 44, 28 joined the team of their own initiative, some as a result of seeing the *This Day Tonight* TV segment, the others were referred to us. All have a very high level of motivation and dedication to the task.









The School System — Some Observations

Adult illiteracy doesn't happen to adults: it happens to children. It is merely an extension or continuation of a juvenile condition.

In a society where illiteracy is not supposed to occur, where, that is, education is a universal provision, the bases of the early condition may be complex indeed. It does not result from a mere lack of educational opportunity.

It may stem from early physical, psychological or emotional conditions (though any physical problems in the sample with which this Report deals are marginal only);

. . . from parental attitudes to schooling, most often based on the parents' own educational experiences;

. . . from parental unwillingness to accept the fact of slow learning as an actual condition;

. . . from the physical and other conditions of domestic life;

. . . from peer-group or other social pressures, particularly in "streaming" situations;

. . . from early traumatic experiences in school;

. . . from a variety of other causes rooted in the child's early experience both inside and outside the school;

. . . and from clumsy teaching — from professional apathy and insensitivity, and from a lack of supportive facilities and resources.

The school, then, may often not be responsible for the root cause itself. However, insofar as the school system must accept responsibility for anything at all, it must accept responsibility for the universal development of basic skills — the 3Rs. That is the very least society has a right to demand of the school system; that's basically what it's there for.

Nevertheless, it is clear that there exist within the school system the conditions under which budding illiteracy may be brought to flower.

The main contributing factor would appear to be

. . . the real lack of a corps of teachers highly trained and specialized in the problem of slow learning amongst children, a Task Force of especially sensitive "remedial teachers" and parent counsellors given maximum flexibility of operation, access to all schools, mobility amongst schools, equipped with special resources, reading materials, individual programming facilities, testing, assessment and diagnostic machinery, capable also of training teachers and school librarians. Such a

Task Force would relieve individual schools of coping with what might be small problems numerically in their individual total student population and would bring to the problem trained expertise in place of fumbling and guess-work.

Such a Task Force should measurably relieve a number of problems which face the school system:

. . . the difficulty of schools to accommodate to the needs and educational backgrounds of itinerant students.

The itinerant child suffers the natural disadvantages of having to come to terms with new peer groups, new teachers, new environments, which may be traumatic enough. To make matters worse, it is rare that the educational framework of the school is flexibly enough designed, or that special provisions are made, to take up and continue smoothly from the past educational levels of the new students. Most often, they have to fend for themselves, to "catch up" as best they can.

In a system where schools are increasingly encouraged to develop their own independent curricula, and where the increase in vocational and social mobility is leading to a marked increase in population movement, an increasing number of students will be lost in the confusion. Their incapacities may sometimes never be discovered, let alone remedied.

. . . the difficulty of the post-primary school, particularly the High School, to accommodate to "slow learners" pushed up from primary schools into a subject-rather than student-oriented environment. In the post-primary environment of specialized subject teachers, the responsibility for the slow learner, for the student ill-equipped to read, write, compute and study, falls on no-one's shoulders (save, perhaps, the English teacher). The training of secondary teachers (even of some primary teachers) equips them to know little, it anything, of the psychological, emotional, physical and other bases of slow reading, writing and computing. The "remedial class" is sometimes little more than a poor excuse to separate the "slow" from the mainstream of average-to-bright students.

. . . the almost total inadequacy of student records and bio-data, accompanying the movement of children from school to school. This applies not merely to the mid-year movement of individual students from school to school, but to the general movement from primary to secondary schools. The lack of real student records, background profiles, charts of educational development rates, and the lack of regular detailed examination of each child's educational capacities poses real probems to schools, and real barriers to proper educational treatment of the child whether "forward" or "backward". There appears to

be quite inadequate machinery for monitoring personal rates of basic skill development (few, if any for monitoring aberrations) let alone appropriately flexible structures for dealing with them. This is a problem, not merely for the loner, but for all school students on transfer, and it is coupled with real cracks in the system between primary and post-primary schooling through which the unfortunate too easily fall.

. . . the inadequacy of primary school libraries and the question of the relevance of early reading materials and reading as a recreation to the lives that young people lead in today's society. It is clear that the beginnings of some "slow reading" lie in the early reading material itself. Today's reading material — particularly in subject matter — has to compete with strong opposition in the struggle for the child's attention — particularly where there is little or no parental guidance in the matter.

In this respect, primary school libraries are often hopelessly inadequate. Any firm basis for the development of good reading habits is to be found in attractive libraries. The concentration upon secondary school libraries is, perhaps, to shut stable doors after horses have bolted. It may well be essential to our future to develop a society of readers as a first priority and a society of studiers as a second.

These are particularly complex conditions, not easy of remedy. They are characteristic of most education systems we know. They suggest refinements to the education system requiring personnel, physical facilities, funds which may not exist. They also suggest some reshaping of attitudes by parents and in schools.

They also suggest that the solution to the problem is to be found in serious thinking, replanning, provision of resources — not in oversimplified proposals such as the teaching of Phonetic Spelling, for instance. There are no easy remedies; and the remedies are not to be found in spelling reform so much as in school reform.

SECTION III

Part 1

Techniques

This section was written by two group leaders with different approaches, and illustrates the freedom which has been encouraged in the project, and the great importance of the group relationship whatever method is used.

One group leader writes:

A fairly high percentage of group leaders came from teaching situations—at least half of the paid leaders are at present involved in secondary level remedial English teaching—and have drawn on this background, making any necessary adjustments to cater for adult interest levels, and to allow for their greater range of knowledge and experience.

Although the groups were small, the variance in reading age and skills demanded either close individual attention or perhaps two people sharing an activity. In this situation, lack of material was a problem. Firstly, there is very little material developed specifically for adult use so both approach and materials were experimental, especially in the early stages. Secondly, only a small number of groups operated in the Council of Adult Education building; library facilities, and items like cassettes and white boards, were not easily available to everybody.

Techniques could not be dictated or hard and fast, since the expectations and needs of students were so varied. With some students a mastery of basic phonic skills must be combined with fast-moving 'social sight' vocabulary-building programme. A phonic approach involves a methodical sound-based approach to reading which is generally appealing to students who have experienced some degree of failure. It breaks the mass of words into small sections which follow constant rules, and it provides a means of coping with the irregularities of the English language. A single given sound is shown to follow a rule, and within a determined context can be used to build up a series of words which work in the same manner. Students learn to hear particular sounds in words and to recognize which letter stands for the sound, and this works as a key to groupings of words. Sight reading on the other hand depends

on familiarity with a particular word as a whole. The word is presented either alone on a flash card or in a context which helps to explain the word. Because it is a memory-based scheme and very demanding, it is used in conjunction with other approaches. It is invaluable in teaching words which are important to the person involved, and less useful with the mass of ordinary words. 'Social sight' words like 'Toilet, Danger, Stop, Don't Enter' are integrated into these schemes and given high priority since they are an essential part of everyday life. Some group members came with some ability to read but with a few or no skills for spelling and writing. For these people a simplified approach has been most valuable. This involves basic grammar work in conjunction with spelling formulae and explanation of the mechanics of word building, to make it possible to transfer the reading skill they do have into other fields. Many adults also required help with numeracy skills and need openings into various general knowledge areas. These people required simple material in English, Geography, Social Studies and Science.

The success or failure of particular techniques or books was a regular topic of discussion at the workshop and the most useful material was selected to form a basic teaching kit. It was particularly difficult to find simplified readers which were suited to adult interest levels—most of the remedial readers available are directed to either primary or teenage readers. Adults, while they may have trouble reading the books, find the subjects juvenile and sometimes humiliating. Some students did not object because their desire to read was so strong, but others found the books too frustrating to finish. Modified versions of books such as 'The Triffids' were popular, also books such as 'Marty', the story of an ugly, socially incompetent person who is lonely and bored with living alone with his mother. This is a very emotional and complex book, however, and many of the group members did not have the emotional stability to cope with this sort of material. Series dealing with science fiction were well liked but generally the reading skill required for these books was too high. Most of the simpler books were totally unsuited for adult work.

The group leader goes on to write about one person's reaction to her group:

FRED is 22, working as a builder's labourer and has been promoted recently to foreman. Fred is thrilled and frightened about this. He is not sure he will be able to cope with the paperwork involved. He has a lively personality and gives support and confidence to other members of the group. When he first started he recognized only a few of about thirty sight words and could not read sentences. He was in fact illiterate. We started working with phonics very systematically each week and he soon showed dramatic improvement. Fred spent at

least one year in a special school and was diagnosed as "dyslexic". He seems to know much more than he can demonstrate but for emotional reasons represses much of his knowledge. It is only as he regains confidence that sounds and words are falling into place for him. Recently he recognized nine out of ten sight words chosen at random and he can now cope with any simple phonetic words: e.g. double consonant blends at beginning or end of words and double vowels. He is also coming to terms with more complex sounds and is gradually extending his vocabulary. He now realises with great delight that he can read signs, and spends his lunch hour wandering around the city enjoying his capacity for sign reading. He is very enthusiastic and has refused several jobs in Sydney so that he can continue to come to the group.

Another group leader writes:

PAULA FRIEND is a twenty four year old single mother with a two year old son. Paula began school at a State School in Gippsland. During her first year at school her father died. She moved to the city and after a break of a year started at a suburban State Primary School in second grade. In third grade she attended a remedial class. She moved again to Gippsland and then back to Melbourne attending a girls' High School and spending two years in both Form I and Form II. There was no attempt at remedial help in either High School. Paula then attended classes at the YMCA for a short period, later she sought out a remedial teacher near her home. The emphasis of these lessons was heavily phonic. Her early school reading experience was based on the 'Look and Say' method. The result of all her attempts to obtain remedial help is that she can recite *John and Betty* verbatim. When Paula joined a group she knew "all her letters and most of her sounds". Her "street reading" ability was very poor, and she shopped by the recognition of shapes and colours and seemed to ignore words altogether.

My approach was based on Herbert Kohl's book *Reading, How To.* At the end of the first session we had established about seventy sight words. The first six sessions were based on our conversations and her direct speech, e.g. printing out rapidly her most emotionally charged words and sentences.

We moved on to simple readers which were geared towards teenage interest, and bore some relationship to her own experiences, plus the use of popular magazines, recipes and 'the stars'. Paula has now begun work on a structured program and is progressing rapidly. She shops by brand names, writes letters and is confident in day to day reading situations. Forms still paralyse her. She tends to read too rapidly and to base her decoding on the recognition of one central word. The basis of her structured program is a recognition of patterns rather than blending of sounds.

Paula is intelligent and highly articulate, but she spells exactly as she speaks and hears, and it is hoped that this pattern based program will help improve her spelling.

LIZ, aged twenty-six with a child of eight years, attended a surburban State Primary School to Form I. Liz comes from an illiterate family. Her father is an alcoholic and deserted her mother when Liz was ten.

Our first sessions with Liz were informal and geared towards gaining her trust and confidence. She did not recognize all the letters of the alphabet and had difficulty in distinguishing between the name and sounds of the letters. I began, as with Paula, by rapidly printing felt pen and newsprint words and sentences from our conversations. Though she could not distinguish separate sounds and letters she could read words like 'baby', 'bottle', 'kill', 'hate', and her own conversation:

eg. 'My mother makes me feel ashamed.'

eg. 'The man hit the woman with the axe.'

I asked her to write about the most important feeling in her life. She wrote: *'I love Wayne'* (her son).

Surprisingly, she has a highly developed street reading ability, and can read labels. She was able to read street names, simple signs and words such as 'sandwiches', 'records', 'steak', 'jeans', 'shorts', 'instant coffee', when she came to the group.

The sessions consisted of reading her own conversations and using these to work on simple words and sounds. We then moved on to more structured training in consonants, sounds and blends. Her progress has been interrupted by a month in hospital.

Paula and Liz have developed a supportive friendship. Liz with Paula's help is making the first moves to leave her mother's home and set up an autonomous life with her son. These first steps in learning to read have effected a change in Liz's life. She is a long way from being an independent reader but is making great progress in becoming an independent person.

The experiences of these young women in the group has deepened my conviction that learning to read, for an adult, is not just a matter of skills and practice. It must be understood as a therapeutic relationship producing personal growth in both student and the teacher, and in some cases the unfolding of the personality precedes the unfolding of the learning process.

Part 2

Social Importance of Groups

There is no doubt that the Council of Adult Education Literacy Project has had a significant social influence on the group participants. This influence has operated both within and outside group situation.

The small group approach employed for the project appears to have two important beneficial social effects:

. . . firstly, the members assist each other to learn effectively by engendering a more relaxed atmosphere and by providing each other with practical assistance in the learning situation.

. . . secondly, the groups provide a social reform in which people with problems of isolation, low self esteem, and inability to cope adequately with the words can exchange ideas and gain mutual support.

The group situation has, in many cases, led to a strong sense of group unity. The weekly meeting of the group has become an important social event for the participants as well as being a valuable 'learning to read' experience. It is the view of many group leaders that the informal discussions (which in some cases have become an integral part of each meeting) have done much to help the social competence, as well as improve the level of verbal expression, of the participants, many of whom, because of their disability, have deliberately restricted their social contacts to their immediate family. In this sense the groups themselves have widened social contacts of the participants resulting in increased confidence enabling them to extend their social contacts in everyday life. Group members have expressed great satisfaction at being able to talk with others who will understand about past difficulties and present problems, for example embarrassment when disability becomes obvious to children, coping with normal social situations such as following written directions, taking messages etc. The group members feel greater sensitivity and tolerance towards other people in both the group and their families.

In conclusion, the social benefits of the groups can be summed up as follows—

(a) Improvement in self image both through acquisition of reading skills in particular and communication skills in general.

(b) Increase in potential employment opportunities and possibility of greater earning capacity with resultant social benefits.

(c) Overall therapeutic value of above three points.

Part 3

The Role of the Workshop

Throughout the year a monthly workshop was held by contracted tutors. These workshops were also attended from time to time by voluntary tutors and other interested people. The function of the workshop was to provide continuous evaluation of all aspects of the literacy scheme, to act as a supportive and informative centre for group leaders and a forum for the exchange of ideas. In addition it allowed administrative matters to be discussed, and the planning of future programs as the limitations of the current scheme and new needs became apparent.

During the two-hour workshops reports were given by group leaders, enabling groups and individuals to be discussed and compared. Tutors were able to cover problems relating to group interaction and individual learning difficulties, together with relevant personal background information and its effect on literacy skills. The reports, including workshop analysis of different students' writing and reading ability, indicated a wide range of ability and achievement. The group leaders often encountered difficulty in coping with such differing ranges of ability. Adequate attention to each student was not always possible in a group whose members ranged from minimal learners to, for example, good readers but poor spellers. Similarly, people with physical disabilities such as impaired hearing, or emotional problems, were an additional demand on leaders' flexibility. This led to the conclusion that the program for the following year should contain some homogeneous groups of people with similar problems. It was also felt that mixed groups should continue as often the ability of people at different stages of progress to help and encourage each other proved very valuable in the re-establishing of self-respect.

The workshop also provided a valuable resource centre for group leaders on the availability and effectiveness of teaching materials. Different methods and approaches were discussed. Tutors had complete freedom of approach in dealing with individual difficulties, and the exchange of ideas and consultation with other people working on the project was extremely valuable. A basic teaching kit* was drawn up out of the restricted amount of material available which was suitable for adults and was thought to be useful to group leaders. This was not to be considered as a standard or necessary adjunct to teaching. Out of this arose the awareness of a considerable lack of suitable teaching material, especially in the form of entertaining, simplified novels or non-fiction works likely to be of interest to an adult, and providing an incentive to reading for pleasure independently.

*See Appendix 5

The Council of Adult Education Librarian attended many workshops and was very helpful in building up a remedial library and in obtaining language games and tutor material. Lists of books were kept up to date and made available to tutors and groups. Book displays from publishing companies were arranged from which tutors chose useful material for their groups.

It became evident fairly early in the year that many people with reading and writing problems often had similar difficulties in numeracy though there were exceptions to this. Where a specific need arose it was included in the group work, for example household budgeting, especially in the single mothers' group.

Because of community demands to expand the program, especially after the scheme was discussed on television, it was decided to include "volunteers". This led to some of the workshops becoming unwieldy with much larger attendances, and discussion of individual needs became difficult. As a result an ancillary workshop was formed for the volunteer leaders, with contracted leaders attending if possible. The volunteers contributed greatly to meeting the extra demands, and although more group leaders will be contracted next year, volunteers will still play an important role. In fact many people prefer to do this work on a voluntary basis.

During the year there was continuous evaluation of the role of the workshop and it was agreed that it was a vital part of the scheme and essential to the implementation and development of a flexible literacy program. Generally, people felt the best meetings were those small enough for all to participate. Some considered the meeting time could be extended and that workshops could be more frequent. With the expansion of the program, meetings could be on a regional basis, with provision for some general meetings to co-ordinate the project as a whole.

One of the most significant functions of the workshop was to provide information and a support group for tutors who had no previous teaching experience. It was felt that the combination of their enthusiasm and spontaneity together with the specific skills of the trained teacher would act as a catalyst in the development of an effective and relevant approach to the people involved. To this end experts in various fields were invited to workshop meetings, among them Dr. Bill Richards, educational psychologist and practising psychiatrist, himself a former High School teacher. Mr. Peter Hopper, an expert in the field of minimal learners, and Mr. Robin Barke-Hall, Lecturer in Charge in Philosophy and Education, Melbourne College of Education, Mr. Barry Carozzi of "Task Force", Department of Education, and Mr. Daryl Evans of the Learning Exchange also attended many sessions, so that the workshop

functioned in its turn as a resource for interested and related groups.

Decisions were made on a democratic basis after general discussion, and the atmosphere of the workshop meetings was one of warmth and openness. The diversity of opinion and techniques generated valuable discussion and a wide range of possibilities, based on the concern of all those present to do something to remedy the lack of wide knowledge and lack of provision for adults with learning difficulties. This year's experience has shown that a wider range of programs is in fact necessary to meet community needs, and while the original rationale of the Literacy Pilot Project will continue to cater for people who are illiterate or in the early stages of literacy other courses both within and outside the Council of Adult Education are being set up. At C.A.E. there will be three bridging courses:

Spelling
Improving your spoken and written English
Preparatory English

These courses are planned for people ready to undertake more formal study. A Basic Education course is being established at Footscray Technical College under the auspices of the National Employment and Re-training Scheme. This will be a full time day course for fifteen students, and will span Upper Primary to Middle Secondary work. Some students will be eligible to receive a living allowance of $90 a week. There is also a possibility of similar courses at Footscray and Preston Technical Schools.

The workshop meeting will continue next year as an integral part of the literacy scheme. There may be combined groups on a regional basis, but it is generally agreed that the importance of the workshop is such that it will continue to function as one of the most essential parts of the program.

Part 4

Developments within the Project

Homogeneous Groups

It became obvious through the workshops that an attempt should be made to try homogeneous groups for both beginners and relatively advanced students. In nearly each of the 1974 groups there was one member who found it very difficult to draw on or exist in the group. This was mainly because he or she needed constant attention to make any progress. It was felt in a number of cases that the very basic nature of the work made the member self-conscious. The group leaders themselves sometimes felt inadequate in terms of skills and 'know-how' and perhaps that the responsibility was too great. This was understandable. For when people who are marginally defective, psychologically disturbed, dependent on drugs, unemployed, etc., and who, into the bargain, may have made previous attempts to learn to read and failed, look on the

leader as an expert and perhaps a last chance, it was not unnatural that the leaders under the scheme felt a certain anxiety about their own ability. There is a danger here of course of being able to shift the burden, and implicitly a serious criticism of one of the main planks of the program. For it has been stated many times by the group leaders themselves that the facilitation of the learning of skills cannot be separated from the socially supportive role of the group.

The geographically decentralised groups are the practical expression of this supportive notion.* Within the group the weaker are helped by the stronger and personal relationships are fostered and continue outside it.† At the back of the scheme too is the notion that illiteracy is neither a stigma nor a disease.

Creating two beginners groups that would meet twice weekly in a centralized place (probably the Council's City Centre) would not really promote these latter objectives. Even so if these objections are kept in mind the homogeneous groups may be of considerable value to the scheme.

Similar consideration must be kept in mind regarding advanced groupings. The purpose of experimenting in this area is to see if the speed of learning could be improved for those members who come reasonably literate and whose progress may be impeded in a mixed group.

Workshop Sessions

The workshops were generally successful in 1974. They had to perform several functions which in part contradicted one another.

(a) Exchange of ideas among group leaders
(b) Administrative — Public Relations

The greatest difficulty in terms of productivity occurred when (a) and (b) were merged. It was very difficult to engage in a free discussion of possibilities or personalities when conscious of the effect their performance may have on the public image of the scheme. However both roles are necessary and can be performed by varying the format of the workshops. It was difficult to discuss details of cases and techniques knowing that people were present who needed a more overall exposition and explanation.

Exchange of Ideas

The most constructive workshops were where the tutors met with sole purpose of discussing difficulties, strategies, and students, based on a prepared agenda. One or two members prepared short papers for a detailed exposition upon which discussion grew.

It is imperative that the exchange of ideas should continue to be the main role of the workshops. However it is doubtful that this kind of exchange, which depends very much on person interaction, can work with as many as twenty tutors. It is proposed then that two workshops take place each month on

*See page 14. †See section 4.

different days. At this stage they should take place at the Council of Adult Education building but it may become possible and desirable that the meetings take place on a regional basis.

Administration and Public Relations

It is often necessary for the Council of Adult Education officer in charge of the project, or the librarian, to meet the group for general policy decisions or to discuss new materials. In such cases a general workshop should be arranged.

It is necessary that certain individuals, agencies and institutions be informed of the activities of the scheme in order to facilitate efficient referrals and to communicate the existence of the service to all parts of the community. It is also important that the scheme obtain and evaluate feedback and use the resources that such individuals and agencies* have to offer.

Peripatetic Tutors

The workshops have fulfilled part of the need of tutors for support and exchange of ideas and will continue to do so. But it is difficult to cover everything in such situations. It would therefore be of great benefit for group leaders to be able to call in someone who would observe and work with students or groups and then discuss with the leader the difficulties, tentative strategies, failures, etc. The peripatetic tutor will have the experience to suggest strategies or materials to meet the needs of particular situations. This tutor will also be carrying experience and information from one group to another.

The Council of Adult Education Library

This could be expected to provide information on materials to any interested person or group, material for the personal education of anyone wishing to act as a tutor and specific items required by students and tutors in the Council of Adult Education's programs.

Municipal Libraries

It is essential that material be available where it is needed—in the community where people live and work. In most cases municipal libraries are in a situation to provide adult learners with easy access to a wide range of resources to meet their varied individual and continuing needs. However, at the moment almost nothing is available for adults who want to learn basic skills like reading, arithmetic, writing, etc.

People requiring remedial learning material, as learners or group leaders are not necessarily linked to an educational institution and should be able to turn to their local library for it. The needs are great and specific funding outside the current provisions would be required to attempt anything like adequate provision. Leaders should make it their business to initiate contact with local libraries and follow up moves from the Council of Adult Education.

*Learning Exchanges, Trade Unions, Church organizations, Brotherhood of St. Lawrence, Council for Single Mother and Her Child, Employment Bureaus — school principals and social workers.

SECTION IV

Conclusions and Recommendations

Therefore,

We Assert

that literacy is a basic human need

We Assert

that literacy should also be a basic human right

illiteracy is an affront to human dignity

illiteracy is a serious stigma on societies which permit it to exist in their midst

illiteracy is a real barrier to the proper development of personality; to vocational, social, political and domestic opportunity; to control over personal destiny.

We Assert

that the minimum and first priority of the education system, especially at primary level, must be to ensure that every individual should be able to read, write and numerate to the level of his actual capacity and to a level proportionate to his performing basic social functions.

There can be no greater priority.

Schools should institute procedures to ensure it.

We Believe

(a) that there is a significant, if undetermined, proportion of the population of Victoria illiterate and semi-illiterate through no physical or mental defect;

(b) that the root cause of their condition lies in an inadequacy within the school system;

(c) that no significant effort has yet been made to satisfy their human need once they have left the school system;

(d) that the answer to the problem lies in systems, procedures, methodologies especially appropriate to the problem itself;

(e) that adult illiteracy cannot be dealt with adequately in an institutionalized and bureaucratic framework, that whilst it needs a centralized initiative and resource, its programs and facilities will be most effective if developed at community level in an atmosphere of informality, warmth and flexibility.

Therefore,

We Recommend

that Government at all levels should recognize the existence of the problem in practical terms and through practical programs. It is a local, regional and national problem.

We Recommend

(in Victoria) that immediate provision be made for the setting up of a special Adult Literacy Unit equipped

(a) to research the actual extent of the problem of adult illiteracy in both metropolitan and country areas.

(b) to research into, design, and prepare leaders' and learners' kits to facilitate the extension of the Learning Network throughout the entire community.

(c) to train leaders in adult literacy work

(d) to institute, encourage and assist adult literacy programs where they are needed

(e) to prepare and publish reports, advisory papers, teaching materials and other printed and audio-visual material appropriate to a general adult literacy program.

(f) to encourage employers and unions to involve themselves in the program and to generally promote it in the community.

(g) to provide, that is, a central pool of human, physical and financial resource for institutions, organizations, community groups, and individuals wishing to carry out literacy work, able to be mobile, to act quickly and to operate with maximum flexibility.

We Recommend

that such a Unit be provided for through the Council of Adult Education.

We Recommend

that special advisory-counselling-resource Centres be encouraged in strategic places for authorities, teachers, referees and potential "students"

that these Centres be easily accessible, preferably in commercial areas of needy districts — "shop-front" Centres

that the Centres provide a full resource of literature, advice, counselling, teaching and learning aids, audio-visual hardware and software, access to and information about educational, social welfare and other resources within the community,

that they be specifically designed and equipped for the purpose of dealing with the problems of those adults of little learning

that they be adequately promoted as a community resource under the guidance and assistance of the Adult Literacy Unit.

One cannot consider the problems of adult illiteracy without being forced to look at the school system from which it springs. It is clear that the seeds of adult illiteracy are germinated by the end of primary school, and that there are flaws in that system which need the devotion of special financial and human resources. Without a deliberate and concentrated attack on the existence of incipient illiteracy in schools, we will be continuously faced with curative rather than preventative measures.

It is not within the competence of this Report or the Council of Adult Education to make detailed recommendations affecting the school system. Nevertheless

We Recommend

that adequate funds be directed to special staff and facilities necessary to deal with the problem

We Recommend

that the school system look especially at

(a) the development of a continuing and overlapping process of special treatment and correction of slow readers from primary to secondary levels.

(b) the proper accommodation of school programs to the special needs of the children of itinerant parents.

(c) the provision of increased study grants for teachers to undertake special training in the field.

A()

(d) special in-service training programs for teachers at both primary and secondary/technical levels in the areas of reading and writing skills.

(e) the development of mobile and itinerant teacher groups moving from school to school, adequately trained and equipped to deal with problems of backward learners.

(f) the closer relation of teacher training to the needs of the community, particularly the inclusion in all primary teacher training courses of training in the teaching of reading skills, the treatment of backward readers, and an understanding of the educational, social, psychological, physical and other causes of slow learning, as an essential study.

(g) the provision of adequate funds for research into slow learning at early ages.

SECTION V.

Appendices

1. The Roll of Public Libraries in Adult Literacy Programs
2. Other Agencies Concerned with Adult Literacy
3. Country Needs
4. Bibliography
5. Portable Teaching Kits
6. Acknowledgements

Appendix 1

The role of Public Libraries in Adult Literacy Programs

by Helen M. Modra,
Field Officer, Public Libraries Division, Library Council of Victoria, and Convener, Library Association of Australia Committee on Social Issues.

This paper is a brief outline of some possibilities for fruitful public library involvement in adult literacy programs.

At present there cannot be said to be a significant amount of work being done in this area, although interest by librarians in literacy programs is increasing somewhat, as librarians look outwards to the communities they serve and seek avenues for further co-operation and innovation. There are children's librarians in many public libraries who take a vital interest in helping "reluctant" child readers and their parents, and it is apparent that these librarians have greatly assisted large numbers of such children, and have awakened in them a sense of delight in reading which will be of inestimable benefit in their personal growth and education.

Though there are some public libraries at present involved with reading programs, e.g. Geelong, Sunshine, Warragul, the avenues for cooperation and involvement have not yet been fully considered or explored.

What can be done?

A basic prerequisite for successful cooperation between librarians and literacy tutors is personal contact and mutual understanding of each other's objectives, methods and organisation.

For convenience, avenues for cooperation are examined under the headings Facilities, Materials, and Staff.

Facilities

Many public libraries, especially the newer ones, have meeting rooms/function rooms incorporated into them, or spacious foyers or study areas all of which may be suitable for literacy programs. Small groups may be able to use these premises regularly for lessons, and larger occasional public meetings, guest speakers and the like may be accommodated in the larger rooms. Some of these rooms are equipped for film projection.

Naturally in the case of smaller libraries not having a special meeting room or multi-purpose room, the use of the library may not be possible as meetings would have to be held at times when the library was closed to the public, which may not be feasible.

Policy on such use of library premises, and charges levied if any, vary from Council to Council and this should be checked out by any person or agency interested.

Most libraries have photocopying equipment and equipment for duplicating printed matter. Some have access through their Councils to more sophisticated equipment of this kind. It is likely that librarians may be willing to make access to these services readily available for remedial educators, and assist also by advertising remedial programs via their community noticeboards and in any reports or promotional materials regularly issued by the library.

Again it should be stressed that personal contact with the librarian-in-charge is necessary. If a librarian can be convinced how worthwhile it would be to his community to "open up" the library for such purposes as a literacy program education, the possibilities for fruitful cooperation are many. Some lobbying of municipal councillors may also help since library policy is laid down by municipal councils in the case of single-municipality services, and representative regional library committees, in the case of regional library services.

Materials

To date, most of the work done by public librarians in relation to literacy development has been advising readers and would-be readers about what materials the library currently possesses which are of an appropriate level of difficulty, and providing continued guidance to the collection to parents and teachers. Usually this advisory work has centred on

children and youth, and in most libraries the "remedial readers" are found in the children's library. They may be shelved in a separate sequence or specially labelled for easy location.

Often special booklists are distributed to help users get the most out of the collection, and a parents shelf of stories suitable for reading aloud, and books on learning problems by such writers as Holt, Delacato et. al., is provided.

Paperback series such as the "trend" books are in many libraries. It may be assumed that the dearth of material appropriate for beginning adult readers in public libraries reflect the generally inadequate range of materials published for this group. (As one researcher has put it, *"There is a great shortage of materials which do not contain the instruction, 'and now colour the picture'!".)*

It is possible that the Ulverscroft and other series of Large Print Books, as well as popular magazines and comics found in libraries, may also be a stimulus to the adult beginning reader or newly-literate adult.

Also, the expanding audio-visual collection in many public libraries include music and the spoken word on both record and tape, which are of potential usefulness in teaching, and librarians may be able to assist remedial teachers to get access to other audio-visual hardware or software from other sources in the community.

A different aspect of *materials provision* can be successfully handled by public libraries, through their links into the broader library network. This is the acquisition and dissemination of specialised materials — books, periodicals, pamphlets, fims, etc — relating to the teaching of reading, research into reading problems, evaluation of methods and materials, experience in remedial programs elsewhere, names and addresses of key contact people in remedial education, news of meetings and seminars and the like.

There is a great deal of material being published on these and other aspects of remedial education, which specialists and researchers would have ready access to, but which would most likely never reach the non-specialist teacher or volunteer "in the field" and yet would be of great potential value to him/her.

Librarians by virtue of their training and their professional contacts are well placed to track down and procure all these sources of information, in cooperation with existing educational agencies and specialised libraries. Obviously the size of such a worthwhile task makes it unsuitable for any but a fairly large organisation. It may interest readers of this Report to learn that the Library Association of Australia is currently looking at this question of establishing a "clearinghouse" for information of the kind mentioned, for the use of all remedial work-

ers and librarians alike. We see this work as being of quite vital importance and will be actively engaged on developing solutions to the problem during 1975. Continued liaison with the Council of Adult Education will be an important part of this work.

Staff

Whilst there may be few librarians with the time to spare to actively engage in teaching someone to read, most librarians will be found to be sympathetic to the aims of a literacy program, especially those whose special task is advising public library users on all aspects of library use and information locating. These librarians are usually called Readers Advisers, and they often know a great deal about the community they work in, who the key people are in certain avenues of interest, and so on. (It should be remembered that useful contacts may also be made through the Learning Exchange, where such a service exists in a community.)

It would be well worthwhile for every remedial teacher to go to his public library and make the acquaintance of the Chief Librarian and the Readers Adviser, telling them of his work, asking to be thoroughly acquainted with the Library, its staff and stock and services, and pointing out how he and the library might work together for the benefit of his pupils.

One important additional way in which librarians can assist with literacy programs is to offer to take a personal interest in group members, teaching them how to use the library, getting them over the hurdle of the enrolment procedure and routines associated with borrowing and returning books. Most important of all, a sympathetic librarian can often be the right person to give that much needed *continuing guidance* to those who have begun to read, and are launching out enthusiastically with their newly acquired ability. The provision of friendly, non-judgmental continuing guidance is crucial to the further development of communication skills and the acquisition of the enjoyable lifelong reading habit. Without such assistance, people may easily become discouraged and lapse back into a world where minimal use of the new skills leads to their atrophying — a sad prospect indeed.

To sum up

Public libraries have the potential to be of considerable assistance to literacy tutors and their students or group members. Tutors are urged to take the first step of seeking out their local librarian with a view to involving him or her in the literacy program as appropriate.

HELEN M. MODRA

Appendix 2

Other Agencies concerned about Adult Literacy

1. **'Task Force' — Special Services, Education Dept.,** Queensberry St., Nth Melbourne, Victoria 3051.
   Reading and Writing Project — Adult Literacy
   Co-ordinator — Mrs. Kath Kimber
   Age Range 15 - 70+
   Recruitments —

Tutors —	Posters in libraries throughout city and suburbs (best results from these). Appeal over 3AK Learning Exchange.
Students —	Social Workers 3AK SPELD
At Carlton Centre —	32 tutors 34 students
Sunshine Centre —	5 tutors 5 students
Heidelberg Centre —	2 tutors 3 students
Office (classes for shift workers).	5
Outsiders (Private homes)	15 tutors 15 students
Ex-students	37
Ex-tutors	20

   Program commenced September 1973

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2. **Gould House,** 225 Alma Road, East St. Kilda, Victoria 3182. Phone 52 1287
   A diagnostic and remedial teaching centre for school children. Some adults are being assisted on a one-to-one fee paying basis.

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3. **Correspondence School**
   Branch of the Education Department. 262 Queen St., Melb. 3000, Phone 67 7301
   Co-ordinator — Miss Beryl Millman
   Number of adult students 129
   Men 2/3 Women 1/3
   Approximate ages: Majority 20 - 30's.

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4. **SPELD** 107 Collins Street, Melbourne, 3000 Phone 63 8495
   Advisory service for school children. The organization frequently receives queries from adults who are then referred to either Task Force, Correspondence School or the Council of Adult Education.

5. **Y.M.C.A.**, 1 City Road, South Melbourne. Phone 62 4151
Director — Mr. Paul Dunning
Tutor — Miss Stephanie Sweeting
There are 26 people coming to the Y.M.C.A. for help

Male	21	
Female	5	
	26	
Under 17 yrs		10
Over 17 yrs		16
		26

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6. **Geelong Reading Unit.** Lunan House, Lunan Avenue, Geelong, Victoria 3220. Phone (052) 72292
Co-ordinator: Mr. David Brown

There are 20 adults, five women and fifteen men currently being assisted on a one to one basis or within a small group. Tutors are all trained teachers and are working voluntarily. Adult students have been referred by Department of Labour, Social Workers, Commonwealth Rehabilitation — Citizen Advice Bureau.

Appendix 3
Country Needs

The Council of Adult Education has received information and requests for help from many country Continuing Education centres, High Schools and Primary Schools.

- Special Education Unit, Bendigo
- Regional Directorate, Gippsland
- Latrobe Valley Continuing Education Centre
- The Central Gippsland Continuing Education Centre
- Continuing Education Centre — Albury-Wodonga
- Continuing Education, Ballarat Region
- Forum — Benalla
- Drouin Primary School
- P.A.C.E. Shepparton
- Echuca High School
- Continuing Education Centre, Wangaratta
- Christian Community College, Maryborough
- Proceed Continuing Education Centre, Warragul
- Education Officers from Prisons and Training Centres.

Adult illiteracy is by no means an urban problem. One executive officer writes: "There are many people in need of assistance e.g.

> *"those who have been through the school system — many are in need of assistance, ages ranging from 15 to middle-aged or elderly, a horrifying indictment of our educational system.*
>
> *"Many, to our present knowledge, are in remote areas of the district, needing individual help.*
>
> *"Migrants with minimal or no tuition in written or spoken English — these again are scattered, as we have no large groups of migrants in any one place, or of any one nationality (unlike the Latrobe Valley). Individual help, particularly to farm women, is required.*
>
> *"Aboriginal people in this area have needs for help in the matter of literacy, combined with help with many other problems. There can be no simple answer to their needs, but a combined and patient effort in co-operation with others assisting in this field.*
>
> *"Those who have missed contact with the school system — a group which will continue to exist to some extent as children of timber, fruit-picking, circus and side-show families often gain little or no consistent schooling; the isolated or ill may also still need help. We have found these to form a very significant group."*

Appendix 4

Suggested Bibliography for Group Leaders

Ashton Warner, S. *Teacher* (Bantam Books, Toronto)

Fader, D. N. *Hooked on Books* (N.Y. Berkeley Publ. Co. 1968)

Kohl, Herbert *Reading, How To* (N.Y. Dutton, 1973)

Zintz, Miles V. *The Reading Process* (Dubuque, Iowa, Brown 1970)

Morris, Ronald *Success and Failure in Learning to Read* (Penguin, 1973)

Haviland, R. Michael *Survey of Provision for Adult Illiteracy in England* (School of Education, University of Reading, 1973)

Flesch, Rudolf *Why Johnny Can't Read* (N.Y., Harper & Row, 1955)

O'Donnell, Michael P. *Teaching Reading to the Untaught* (Multi media Education Inc. 1972)

FAURE REPORT *Learning to Be* UNESCO, 1972

Freire, Paulo *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Penguin Education)

Freire, Paulo *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Penguin Education)

Freire, Paulo *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Sheed and Ward, London, 1973)

Truax, Charles B.; Carkhuff, Robert R. *Toward Effective Counselling and Psychotheraphy Training and Practice* (Aldine Pub. C. Chicago, 1967)

Carkhuff, Robert R. *Helping and Human Relations* Vol. I. A Primer and Lay and Professional Helpers, Selection and Training. (Holt Rinehart & Winton Inc. 1969)

Carkhuff, Robert R. *Help and Human Relations* Practice and Research, Vol. II.

Clyne, Peter *The Disadvantaged Adult* Educational and Social Needs of Minority Groups (Longmans 1972)

Hyde and McMillan *Survey on Illiteracy in Victorian Schools* Shane Cahill (Nov. 1974)

Macquarie University *School of Education, Survey on Adult Illiteracy*

Makita, *The Rarity of Reading Disability in Japanese Children.* American Journal of Orthopsychiatry

(This study indicates that the prevalence of dyslexia in Japan is some ten times lower than in Western countries. This article proposes that the specificity of the used language is the most potent contributing factor in the formation of reading disability).

Appendix 5
Portable Teaching Kits

Booster Workbooks, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, **W. C. H. Chalk,** Heinemann

Judge for Yourself, Book 2, **S. Hilton Irving,** Chatto & Windus

Dictionary Three, **Brown Downing & Screats,**

Chambers Young Set Dictionaries, 1972

Dr. Spello (2nd ed.) **W. Kottmeyer,** McGraw-Hill, 1968

Reader's Digest Reading Skill Practice Pad 2, Reader's Digest 1968.

Reader's Digest Advanced Reading Skill Builder Book 2.

Reader's Digest Readings

Cracking the Code, Student Workbook, Teacher's Guide, Reader S.R.A.

Home Tutor, Modern Teaching Aids.

Phonic Rummy, Nos. 2, 5, 8. Kenworthy Educational Service, 1973

Breakthrough to Literacy

Cassette Recorder/Player

Language Master

Magnetic Whiteboard

Appendix 6
Acknowledgments

The following people have directly contributed to this report:

Co-ordinator:	*Dominica Nelson*
Group Leaders:	*Marie Barlow* *Kate Costigan* *Robyn Francis* *Neil Gilbert* *Peter Hansen* *Rosemary Hicks* *Alison Hunter* *Patricia Lawson* *Mary Ryan*
Librarian — Council of Adult Education:	*Heather Landers*
Field Officer, Library Council of Victoria:	*Helen Modra*
Graphics:	*Sister Margaret Costigan*
Typing and Proof Reading:	*Patricia Twist*

THE COUNCIL OF ADULT EDUCATION

The Council of Adult Education is an autonomous statutory body set up by the Victorian Government in 1947. It has broad responsibility for advising the Minister of Education about adult education in this State, recommending new policies and procedures, and in planning and supervising the development and administration of adult education in Victoria.

As part of its function, the Council engages in a program for the education of adults in both metropolitan and rural Victoria. Through its class program, discussion groups service, ad hoc schools, conferences and workshops, Arts education program and a variety of other services both formal and informal, the Council's work embraces the broad spectrum of human interests, whilst remaining largely non-technical, non-vocational and non-credit. It seeks to give as many people in the community as possible the opportunity of continuing their education according to their needs and capacities on a part-time, modular and recurrent basis. Council's interest in those people educationally disadvantaged by remoteness, institutionalization, and other causes had led in recent years to a variety of new projects — prison workshops, aboriginal programs, Arts Train, Telephone Tutorial System, the Literacy Project, assistance to country Continuing Education Centres, to mention some.

The Council is funded by the State Government which makes a basic provision, and provides its own funds from fees and other sources. Whilst Council works very closely with a wide variety of governmental departments and education institutions, and encourages the involvement of educational activity by groups throughout the community, it has steadily maintained its own independence. It is unique in Australia in its independence of the Public and Teaching Services, the Education Department and other Departments, Universities and other educational agencies.

Any enquiries about the Council and its work can be directed to Council of Adult Education, 256 Flinders Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000. Australia.